



# NRS Fast Facts

## Characteristics of Participants in Adult Basic Education Beginning Level Literacy: 2004–2009

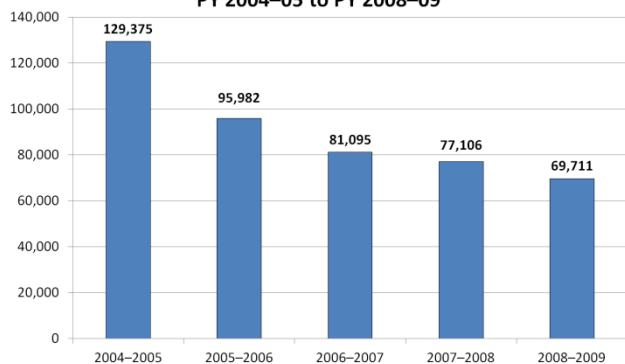
### Background

Improving adult literacy is a primary goal of the U.S. Department of Education’s adult education program. The performance of participants in the adult basic education (ABE) Beginning Literacy level is of particular importance because these students have the lowest level of literacy skills in the ABE program. They often have the most difficulty meeting their learning goals, including gaining employment and acquiring a high school diploma or passing the GED tests. Instruction at the ABE Beginning Literacy level addresses the needs of these students. This FastFacts presents the national picture and state highlights of the changing demographics of ABE Beginning Literacy participants from program year (PY) 2004–05 through 2008–09.

### NRS Data<sup>1</sup>

From 2004–05 to 2008–09, the number of participants in the ABE Beginning Literacy program decreased by 46%, from almost 130,000 students to fewer than 70,000 (see chart). This decrease corresponds to an overall decrease in enrollment for adult education programs nationally, along with level funding and decreased funding in many states (not shown).

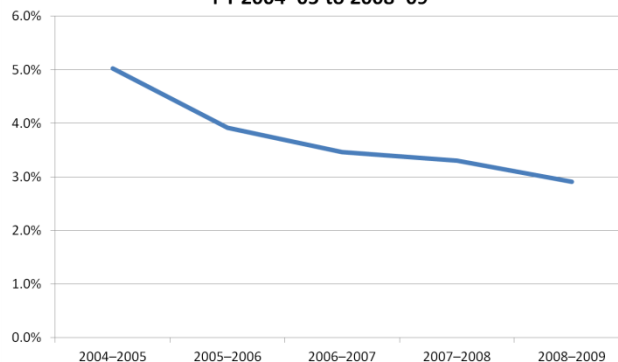
Number of Students Enrolled in  
ABE Beginning Literacy  
PY 2004–05 to PY 2008–09



<sup>1</sup>The data for the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico are reported here.

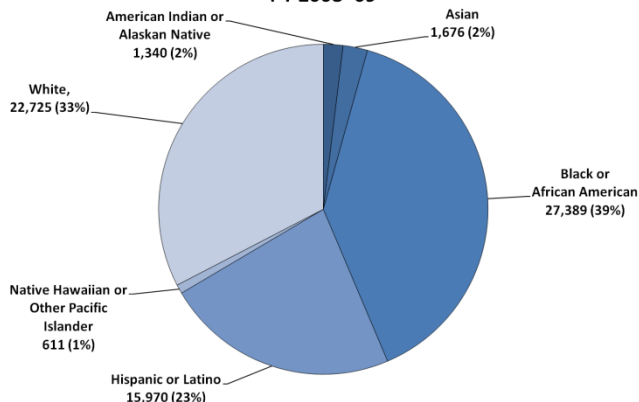
In 2004–05, about 5% of participants in adult education programs were at the ABE Beginning Literacy level. By 2008–09, the percentage had dropped to 3% of students, indicating that the programs were serving proportionally fewer low-literate students in 2008–09 (see graph).

Percent of Adult Education Participants  
in ABE Beginning Literacy  
PY 2004–05 to 2008–09



Black or African American students accounted for the largest percentage of participants in ABE Beginning Literacy classes, making up 39% of the student population in 2008–09 (see chart). White students followed at 33%. In contrast, Black or African American and White students represented only 20% and 26%, respectively, of all students served in adult education programs (not shown in chart).

Race/Ethnicity of ABE Beginning Literacy Participants  
PY 2008–09



Overall enrollment in the ABE Beginning Literacy program decreased by 46% from 2004–05 to 2008–09, and the number of participants from each racial or ethnic group also decreased (see table). Hispanic or Latino students demonstrated the largest percentage change over the past 5 years; the total number decreased by 50% from 2004–05 to 2008–09.

Race/Ethnicity of ABE Beginning Literacy Participants in PY 2004-05 and PY 2008-09			
	2004–05	2008–09	Change
American Indian or Alaska Native	1,702	1,340	-21%
Asian	2,702	1,676	-38%
Black or African American	48,924	27,389	-44%
Hispanic or Latino	32,080	15,970	-50%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1,034	611	-41%
White	42,933	22,725	-47%
<b>Total</b>	<b>129,375</b>	<b>69,711</b>	<b>-46%</b>

### State Highlights: 2008–2009

The states with the largest number of participants in the ABE Beginning Literacy program were usually the most populated states. California had the largest number of low-literate participants, with more than 12,500 students, who accounted for roughly 18% of all ABE Beginning Literacy participants. The five states with the largest number of ABE Beginning Literacy participants in 2008–09 follow:

- California: 12,678
- Florida: 9,541
- North Carolina: 8,564
- Texas: 2,834
- New York: 2,174

Although these five states contributed the most in number, the picture changes for the percentage of least-literate participants relative to the total number of ABE participants within the states. The following four states and the District of Columbia had the highest percentages of students in ABE Beginning Literacy in 2008–09:

- District of Columbia: 7% (293)
- North Carolina: 7% (8,564)
- Utah: 6% (1,684)
- Oklahoma: 6% (1,083)
- Arkansas: 5% (1,732)

At the other end of the spectrum, the five states below had the lowest percentage of ABE Beginning Literacy participants:

- South Dakota: 0.5% (16)
- Nevada: 0.6% (48)
- Colorado: 0.9% (127)
- North Dakota: 1.0% (18)
- Massachusetts: 1.0% (219)

The majority of states (39) and the District of Columbia saw their enrollments in ABE Beginning Literacy decrease in the last 5 years. However, in some states the percentage of states in this level increased. The greatest growth and loss from 2004–05 to 2008–09 are presented in the table below in order of percentage.

States with the Largest Increases and Decreases in ABE Beginning Literacy Enrollment			
Largest Increase		Largest Decrease	
Vermont	198%	Delaware	-93%
Utah	36%	South Dakota	-83%
Rhode Island	36%	Florida	-79%
Washington	33%	Tennessee	-75%
Puerto Rico	32%	New York	-69%

### Resources

- To learn more about the U.S. Department of Education’s adult education and literacy program, go to the Department’s Division of Adult Education and Literacy at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/index.html>.
- To learn more about the National Reporting System, see the Web site at <http://www.nrsweb.org>.

### Contact Us

*This FastFacts was written and produced by the American Institutes for Research under contract GS-10F-0112/ED-VAE-10-O-0107 of the U.S. Department of Education. For more information or additional copies, contact [nrs@air.org](mailto:nrs@air.org). Do you have an idea for FastFacts? Send it to [nrs@air.org](mailto:nrs@air.org).*